

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL, 770 VERNON AVENUE  
**MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2008 AT 7:30 P.M.**

Present: **Chair:** Mayor Leonard  
**Council:** Councillors Brice, Brownoff, Derman, Gillespie, Hunter, Ngai, Sanders, and Wergeland  
**Staff:** Chris Nation, Municipal Solicitor; Russ Fuoco, Director of Planning; Paul Butterfield, Engineering Technician; and Isobel Hoffmann, Senior Committee Clerk

-----  
Councillor Wergeland declared pursuant Section 85 of the Council Procedure Bylaw, he recently sold the property at 771 Helvetia Crescent which has the potential for future development and therefore he will not be taking part in the discussion regarding the proposed development guidelines. Councillor Wergeland left the meeting at 7:32 pm  
-----

PLD55  
XRef: Helvetia Cr.  
Proposed develop-  
ment guidelines

**HELVETIA CRESCENT – PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

Report of the Director of Planning dated March 26, 2008 recommending the Cordova Bay Local Area Plan be amended to identify Helvetia Crescent as a specific policy area and that Policy 7.3 be amended as outlined to ensure that the evaluation of rezoning/subdivision applications for properties within the Helvetia Crescent Policy area takes into consideration the use of the combined driveways, the preservation of trees and limiting the house size to 500 m<sup>2</sup>

Mr. G. Klassen, 5154 Del Monte Avenue, speaking on behalf of the neighbours who submitted a letter dated April 20, 2008 to Council, stated:

- There was a strong neighbourhood response to the change in zoning requested for 763 Helvetia Crescent.
- There is potential for another 16 dwellings on Helvetia Crescent – an increase of 150%.
- Present policies have not worked well in Cordova Bay to protect the urban forest; many trees have been lost through development.
- Protection of the urban forest is a goal of the Local Area Plan (LAP); smaller RS-8 lots do not allow for this protection.
- The study area needs to be larger, to include areas around Del Monte, Walema, Santa Clara and Piedmont, as these are heavily treed also.
- Destroying our urban forests will also affect the abundant wildlife that presently exists.
- The LAP talks about retaining the character of the neighbourhood; the growth shown in the Planner's report will change this character.
- A development of this magnitude will not fit into Saanich's Carbon Neutral Development Policy.
- People who chose to live here pay a premium price and want to maintain the character of the neighbourhood.
- He requested the matter be sent back to staff for further study that:
  - considers the unique urban forest area;
  - expands the study area to include the area bounded by Santa Clara, Walema, Del Monte, Doumac and Piedmont;

- determines the impact of potential development on the trees; and
- amends the LAP to increase the minimum lot size to 930m<sup>2</sup>.
- The Engineering Department should look at the Helvetia/Del Monte intersection: it has poor sight lines at the corner, people do not stop at the stop sign on Helvetia and residents on Del Monte find it difficult to exit their driveways safely.
- Increased development will only make this situation worse.

Mr. D. Noel 751 Helvetia Crescent, stated:

- He agrees with most of the comments of the previous speaker.
- Adding 16 additional homes in an area that is not well serviced by public transportation means there could be up to 30 cars a day going up and down the hill.
- He understands the intersection of Sayward and the Pat Bay Highway is one of the highest crash sites in Saanich; putting more homes on the ridge means more cars through this intersection.
- It is difficult to make decisions now when the Urban Forest Policy and the Carbon Neutral Plan will not be completed until December 2008; any decisions should be held in abeyance until these documents are completed.

Ms. K. Krane, 768 Helvetia Crescent, and speaking on behalf of the owners of 776 and 780 Helvetia Crescent, stated:

- She knows from first hand experience over the past four months that the public transportation system to this area is inconvenient and infrequent.
- The “community service” bus only operates when Claremont School is in session.
- She has had to walk home from the Royal Oak exchange or from the Pat Bay Highway up the hill, neither of which she would be comfortable doing after dark or in the winter months.
- Taking the bus is unfortunately not a viable option in this area.

Ms. S. Bridges, Cordova Bay Community Association, stated:

- The Association has not been against subdivision or rezoning in the past and supports development in a reasonable fashion as long as it is not offensive to the neighbourhood.
- The proposed density does not fit with this area and would be devastating.
- Density belongs near shopping centres and areas that are well serviced.
- She cannot see the relevance in the Planner’s Report because it mentions only driveways, protection of trees and house sizes – these are issues that are addressed in all subdivision applications.
- The document does not address the neighbours’ concerns about density.
- From the sketches provided with the report, it is hard to get an idea of the density if the footprint is unknown, where driveways will be located, or how many trees will be removed.
- The Planner’s report will be discussed at the Association’s meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup> and this will be followed by an official letter to Saanich.
- She is not against development but in this area the proposed density is out of line.
- On a personal note she hopes Council and the Planning Department will amend the LAP to have site-specific homes of RS-12 or greater.

Mr. B. Cunnin, on behalf of his client who owns property at 759 Helvetia Crescent, stated:

- There is appropriate density that decreases urban sprawl, reduces the transportation burden and decreases commute distances.
- The LAP for this area has average lot sizes of RS-12 and with lot averaging this allows preservation of trees and greenways.
- This lot density has been in the LAP for 20 years; the Cordova Bay Association and the residents should all know that sooner or later all the properties will be down-zoned to RS-12.
- There will be 16 new homes only if everyone in the area subdivides, and the traffic patterns may change slightly; the new home owners will be residents of the area and will also be concerned with safety.
- There are a lot of trees but it is not an urban forest; the trees are in people's back yards.
- The 4-lot subdivision proposal for 759 Helvetia was designed to preserve as many trees as possible and allow for adequate off-site parking.
- The proposed configuration of two larger panhandle lots at the back and two smaller lots at the front will preserve the significant Douglas Fir tree.

Mr. Bramble, 768 Helvetia Crescent, stated:

- He grew up in the area and has seen many changes over the years, including the loss of trees due to development.
- He lives on a panhandle lot but he hopes these lots are a thing of the past because it leads to over population.
- Traffic has become an increasing issue in the last few years and the transit service is poor in this area.
- We should be looking at more opportunities to open the community to Elk Lake with pedestrian pathways rather than more development.

Mr. K. Whitcroft, 1044 Inverness Road, member of the Environmental Advisory Committee, stated:

- Saanich is moving strongly forward towards sustainability and also to address climate change.
- Development and continued removal of our carbon sinks, wetlands, trees and forested areas over the years has led to climate change and altered our ecosystem.
- Any large treed area should be nullified for development as these areas will protect us in the future.
- The LAP is 20 years old; at that time it might have been alright to develop these areas, but we know better now.
- There will never be a major bus service to this area.
- Density should go near the major centres; this is where you will achieve sustainability.

Mr. J. Flaig, Pacific East Developments Limited, on behalf of the owner of 763 Helvetia Crescent, stated:

- The subdivision application was based on guidelines in the LAP, which was formed with input from stakeholders and approved by Council.
- He agreed there have been changes in the past 20 years but due process was followed; he sees no reason for the LAP to be amended now.
- As part of the subdivision process, he and his client have met with the

- Cordova Bay Association and held public information.
- Other than one neighbour requesting a fence and another underground wiring, there were no objections, not even from the Association; the mixed messages confuse him.
  - They will retain as many trees as possible, including looking at methods of building the foundation so the tree roots are not impacted.
  - The subdivision application complies with the LAP with respect to trees, driveways, height and size.
  - He asked Council to grant his request for subdivision without delay; he has been working on it for over 9 months.
  - He understands people's concerns about density; the property is located within the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB).
  - He understands the concerns about public transit; Transit will only increase their service when there is the population to sustain it.
  - The LAP amendment proposed by Planning will further delay the application; he can see no reason why any property owner cannot work within the LAP and the guidelines that exist.

Mrs. Nichol stated neighbours did not attend the public meetings held by the applicant because they did not approve of the proposal.

Councillor Hunter stated:

- He is familiar with the neighborhood and over the years has watched the devastation of the area, with too many homes and too much traffic on road conditions that leave a lot to be desired.
- There are issues when A-1 lots abut residential areas; he feels strongly that there needs to be a buffer between these areas.
- He has a concern about subdividing large, heavily treed lots zoned A-1 as it reduces the urban character of a neighbourhood.
- The pockets of land within the UCB need to be handled with great care.

Councillor Derman stated:

- An urban forest is more than just a contiguous forest: it is also trees in people's backyards and protection is important.
- This is a very attractive area and he sympathizes with residents who want to keep it this way.
- Climate change is the largest problem that faces mankind today and we have to change the way we use and develop our land.
- A great deal has changed in the 20 years since the LAP was adopted.
- Saanich is trying to take a leadership role in addressing climate change.
- The UCB establishes rural and urban Saanich; it does not establish that there should be density everywhere.
- Density needs to be in areas serviced by transportation and close to shopping centres; this area has no services and is an unlikely candidate for an improved transit system.
- Its location at the top of a hill precludes walking and cycling and the number one contributor to climate change gasses is transportation.

Councillor Brownoff stated:

- Saanich has a number of studies underway, including a revision of the Tree Bylaw, a review of our urban forests and climate change and the

Sustainable Saanich project; she agrees it would be better to have these reports first.

- This area is not designed for density; it will always be car-oriented.
- Density needs to be in areas that have appropriate services.
- The UCB is there to protect rural Saanich; it is not intended that we will highly densify these areas.
- Many valid issues have been raised tonight and she agrees the matter has to be referred back to Planning for site specific issues to be addressed within a larger study area.

Councillor Brice stated:

- She sympathizes with the people who have applications in process and notes it may seem that the ground rules have changed.
- Saanich has many significant studies under way and these should be completed before any decisions are made.
- We need to maintain the character of the area and the whole issue has to be done in a comprehensive fashion, with focus on the urban forest, expanding the study area and increasing the minimum lot size.
- The greater community will benefit from maintaining this as a large-lot, heavily-treed neighbourhood.
- This issue deserves more research.

Councillor Sanders stated:

- She appreciates the input from the community and the Cordova Bay Association and supports the matter being sent back to staff for further input.
- The UCB protects rural areas and restricts urban sprawl: it doesn't mean we will divide land into smaller lots.
- This unique area needs to be protected.
- Considering subdivision applications would be premature until the urban forest strategy and the tree bylaw review have been completed.
- Density fits in the right place; this is not it.
- She also supports expanding the study area.

Councillor Ngai stated:

- In fairness to staff, they provided the report that was requested; now we want more information and an expanded study area.
- It is difficult to estimate the footprint of a house, where the driveways will be and how many trees will be affected.
- Property owners have the right to present their proposals to Council; it is Council's role to support their proposal or not.
- The rules are being changed and this is unfair to these property owners.
- If the study area is going to be widened, we need to determine what this area will be and advise the property owners within it that there could be limitations to what they will be allowed to do with their property.

Councillor Gillespie stated:

- If this area is developed, the size of homes should be restricted.
- Transit service to areas like this will not change until the population and ridership increases.

Mayor Leonard stated:

- He doesn't want to give people false hope about the "urban forest"; people own the property and own the trees and have certain rights.
- Residents should realize that guidelines can have advantages and disadvantages.
- Development can be controlled through the rezoning process.

**Moved by Councillor Derman and Seconded by Councillor Brownoff:  
"That the proposed guidelines for the Helvetia Crescent Study Area be referred back to staff for further development of policies that will provide additional protection for the urban forest and will consider issues with respect to larger lot size requirements."**

**The Motion was then Put and Carried.**

Adjournment

On a motion from Councillor Brownoff, the meeting adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

.....  
CHAIR

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

.....  
MUNICIPAL CLERK